



JIMMY MANCBACH  
MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION

**Jimmy Manzbach Interview  
November 2006**

**A LIFETIME LIVED WITH PASSION AND INTEGRITY**

*“Please don’t let people say that I died young. I have lived a great life and truly enjoyed it all.” – Jimmy Manzbach*

**1. What factors do you consider in determining “greatness” in a wine, winery, and vineyard?**

“I look for the integrity of the Winemaker’s philosophy in making wine and then great commitment to this belief in their winemaking and their vineyards. This includes the expectations of what they want and do – what works in their unique site. That they maintain all the great winemaking standards and vineyard protocols that have been considered over many years and generations (natural cover crop, open canopies etc). What the winemaker thinks is important in working with what is best for the site --- it is not mysticism. They must learn and know their specific situation – there are no generalizations in great winemaking or grape growing – it is a “give and take” in this partnership. If they are buying fruit for their wines, they now buy by the acre instead of by the ton. It gives them the control to maintain their high standards and compensate the grape grower for the exacting procedures and lower tonnage.

**2. What factors do you consider in determining “greatness” in people?**

“I look for the quality of the person and quality of their commitment – that they are in right relationship with the land.”

In corporate wine making the bean counters get involved – they are driven by the bottom line and the marketplace – they just look for wine for sales. They are limited to “risk free” wines. This is a very different level of winemaking. So I look for greatness in a wine – not just the technical data. For instance, Robert Mondavi is “the man” – he has always been a visionary and has led the wine industry towards quality all of his life.”

**3. What are the keys in building a strong high quality wine portfolio?**

“Mr. Mel Dick asked me about 18 years ago what wines I like to drink.” I told him “I like to drink the wines my friends make.” “Wine is more personal to me. I don’t seek out what new wine might get a 96 point scores for there are a ton of great wines.

Stylistically I like some better than others and in my portfolio there is room for all different styles as long as they are well made with the integrity and effort of the winemaker.”

The Gem’s portfolio price parameters require high to ultra – high quality wines. The parameter for me to consider; the integrity of the people that own and make the wine.

Some wineries sell all their wines by their mailing list (direct to consumers). Well, I think you can live by the mailing list and die by the mailing list. It is all good if you have great press but your list can walk when you get bad press. This is a double edge sword for the wineries. It is not like being with The Gem’s portfolio, we are always out there telling the story of the wines and the people – good press or bad press – we believe in what they do.”

Finding the gem’s before they explode onto the scene? Well, it takes energy and vision to find and search them out in the early stages of their building and growing the new wines – then tremendous patience to wait for the production to be ready to taste and increase enough for the market demands.

Jimmy’s Gems are more personal – not built on technical numbers – we tell the stories about the people that make the wine.

I really connect with the experiences in California – I hear all the stories – personal, intimate, and professional.

The quality of our wines, shown consistently over many years, with our hand selling approach has built our reputation. My group of sales professionals covers the buyers that build the brands.

My group is “loyal to people, loyal to me, and loyal to the brands – I micro manage each of my buyers and my wines.

I most respect, appreciate, and am grateful for SWS support to allow me to micromanage my portfolio in this way. What it takes for me to do my business SWS provides me - they are the vehicle to make it work.

The Gem’s? We also help educate small wineries by telling them what works and what is logical. Over the years, wineries have listened to me, changed their plan or direction, and achieved great success.

**4. What characteristics do you look for in a young person to indicate potential as a fine wine professional?**

I look for passion and natural curiosity supported by integrity and focus. These are also the right people to be in business with.

**5. In serious wine, how and why is ageability a factor?**

It is very important. I look for balance, the wine needs to be balanced – it will fall apart if not balanced. In aging in my cellar or advice for anyone’s cellar – “you want to catch the wine on the way up (in development) not on the way down”.

**6. What advice do you give to new winery owners when they state that they want to make “great” wine?**

“Hire people that are passionate – keep your eye on the prize and have a big checking account. Also don’t make decisions solely on the financial aspect but don’t waste money either.”

**7. What advice do you give young people starting their career in fine wine?**

Seek work with quality individuals and companies. They may not pay the most when you start but should be competitive. Keep your eye on the prize.

**8. What do you consider the hallmarks of your winery friendships?**

Personality, Chemistry, Trust, Ethics, Integrity – I am fortunate to work with people that work as hard as I do. SWS is sometimes referred to as the “evil empire”, but for me they are anything but evil – they are good people that work very hard.

**9. What three things are the most important to always remember in our business of great wine?**

Every customer is different and their needs are different. And always keep in mind that feelings are particular and quite sensitive to the person. Don’t ever oversell – especially something that is not right for the store. Find what is appropriate – look at the menu – look for their opportunities within your portfolio.

**10. What three things are the most important to remember in life?**

Feel good about yourself. Feel good about what you do. Friends and relationships are the most important in life.

**11. With the pretense around wine, is there any ritual that is really important?**

I have little to do with the political bull s\*\*\* in this business or with egomaniacs -- people that think they know everything about wine.

**12. Quick thoughts:**

**Favorite Place to drink wine?**

Anywhere with friends.

**Favorite time of day to drink wine?**

Anytime selling wine or sharing with friends.

**Most favorite wine?**

I cannot list just one – I have been really fortunate to have had many great wines. I do like bubbles a lot though.

**Most favorite view in Napa Valley?**

The old “Welcome to Napa Valley” sign.

**Most favorite view in Sonoma?**

The hills above Healdsburg overlooking Dry Creek Valley and Alexander Valley.

**How many vineyards have you walked so far?**

“Are you kidding? You can’t count that high” – big smile and laugh.

**One of the most favorite meals?**

Thomas Keller’s French Laundry with a BBQ saddle of beef with fois gras over the top.

Chef Mark Milletello’s Crab Crusted Black Grouper with Fingerling Potatoes.

Joachim Splichal’s Braised Veal Cheeks.

Again, you can’t count that high or write that long! All my friends that are Chef’s have made great meals for me.

**Most favorite comfort food?**

Cherries, matzos ball soup, and arugula.

*Interviewed most gratefully by Jean Arnold Sessions at Boca Raton Hospital on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006 with his sister Jane Fletcher.*